318 | Toward the Peaceful One | Andrea Read Davis

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**SPEAKERS**

Josh Mangelson, Andrea Read Davis, Karin Peter

**Josh Mangelson** 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

**Karin Peter** 00:33

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host today, Karin Peter. And we've been sharing a series of interviews with the authors of the year long series of Herald magazine articles exploring the guiding question, "Are we moving toward Jesus, the peaceful One?" For those of you who are wondering what the Herald magazine is, it is the official Community of Christ magazine publication that comes out every two months. And you can find the Herald magazine at Heraldhouse.org under the tab, Our Faith. In today's episode, we are visiting with Andrea Read Davis and Andrea is chief Field Operations Officer at Outreach International. Since 1979, Outreach International has facilitated community led development to sustainably address poverty related issues worldwide. They are currently working in 10 countries around the world and you can find them at outreach-international.org, Andrea and her husband Dave live in the Kansas City area. So thanks for being with us today, Andrea!

**Andrea Read Davis** 01:45

Well thank you, Karin. It's wonderful to be with you.

**Karin Peter** 01:47

Now, you've been on Project Zion Podcast before. So I will let our listeners know, if you want to scroll back. You'll find Andrea's original conversation, but today we have her on as an author. So Andrea, your Herald article in the Toward the Peaceful One series is titled "Jesus, the Development Worker" and you begin by talking about poverty, and the effects of COVID-19 in particular on global poverty. So let's start there. Tell us a little bit about poverty, what COVID-19 has done and how you are why you started your article with that.

**Andrea Read Davis** 02:28

Yeah, well, um, as we all know, too well, these days, the pandemic has turned everything just upside down all over the world. And so COVID-19 has made everything more difficult for those living in poverty as well. And so I really felt like it was important to kind of base it in our shared reality, that not only are, are we, in our daily lives affected by this, but those living in poverty are even more so. So like those that depend on day labor, for example, for their primary source of income, they're suffering from lost wages. Those that rely on various government services that require being in gathered spaces or in person, nearly all have been disrupted or deferred. There are some researchers that are now saying that due to this pandemic, the global extreme poverty rate will increase from 8.23% in 2019, to as much as 9.18% under kind of a, the more downside kind of scenario, which may not sound like that much like that's a pretty small percentage. But it essentially, this would be the first increase in global extreme poverty since 1998. And it would effectively wipe out the progress that's been made in poverty reduction since 2017. So it's, it's pretty, it's pretty big. And much like what we are all discovering through this pandemic is that we just spent, we depend so much on technology to just get by, and to do nearly everything in our daily lives now we require some element of technology. So the pandemic is highlighting what's now being referred to as the digital divide, so the massive division between those in the world that have access to computers, internet and other forms of technology. It's really central to almost every aspect of the response to the pandemic. So everything from vaccine research, to online learning models and ecommerce, and some I know some of the communities where we're working, they're trying to adapt to selling their goods in markets to now selling it online. And it's so difficult if you do not have that access to a computer, you do not have access to internet. And they're saying that like in, in our context in what what is more the minority world in developed countries, 87% of us have access to such technology. But in the majority world, in more developing countries, only 19% of people have access. So when you think about how much we really rely on those resources, nowadays, it's significantly impacting those that are living in poverty. So, especially when we think about like, it's so difficult to actually hear the voices and ideas and needs of the poor, when all we're doing is listening and watching and engaging online. So it's, it's interesting kind of how our frame has shifted some with COVID, how it's really began to change the way that we think about the way that we work with those living in poverty.

**Karin Peter** 06:11

Yeah, so as we have, as you said, moved into our cocoon.

**Andrea Read Davis** 06:16

Yeah.

**Karin Peter** 06:18

Where we live and functioning with those of us that have access to digital communication, functioning in this very individualized manner. It's easy then to not only not see the challenge, or hear the challenge, but not address the challenge. And you use a scripture Doctrine of Covenants 163:4, which is the predominant scripture for the series, to kind of frame a call to the church does call to us to face the reality of poverty, and what does that mean for Community of Christ? So, talk a little bit about how you sense that scripture as a call and a challenge.

**Andrea Read Davis** 07:05

 Yeah. So, I really encourage everyone your listeners to to read the Scripture, it's, for me, personally, has impacted me significantly, but there's elements in the scripture that talk about hearing the voices of those that are yearning to be heard. And much like what I was mentioning before about the technology piece, we have to you have to work really, really hard to hear, to listen. So I truly feel and believe this scripture is a sacred calling, it's an urging a pleading to not only open our ears to hear, but to act, through our actions, through our giving, through our presence through our volunteering, advocacy, we turn toward those that are suffering, and we cannot turn away from them. We just can't. So the the line in the scripture at the end, reads, for in their welfare resides your welfare. And this part really gets me every time I read it or hear it. It's so tough, because the culture and society of today in our western world, tells us to put ourselves first often, that our independence is very important to us. And it is to me too. But we're told, often indirectly through the media, or through commercials or other various mediums that to focus on the interests of self, rather than the other, or the stranger or the community or the whole. So for in their welfare resides your welfare in Jesus, we must think of others and act for others first. Because when our happiness and well being in our health is dependent on the health and well being and happiness of others, wow. That means that we really better do something about our neighbors who are suffering. We're really called to be present there.

**Karin Peter** 09:22

Well, now you've gone and brought Jesus into it. So so let's go there. Let's talk about the model of Jesus. Specifically, there's a lens of your article, and that is Jesus as a development worker. So two things might be questions rising in our listeners first, what is the development worker? And second, in what way is Jesus a development worker? So let's, let's go to the first one, what is a development worker?

**Andrea Read Davis** 09:52

Yeah, so a development worked is essentially someone who helps communities help themselves. Sometimes refer to as a community organizer. They're all about working alongside members of a potentially troubled community, working hard to understand them, to inspire them, to support them and offering guidance and opportunities for initiating some sort of change. Could be social change or built change, making improvements in their own community. So that's really what a development workers.

**Karin Peter** 10:31

Okay, so with that in mind, talk about Jesus as a development worker. Yeah.

**Andrea Read Davis** 10:37

So because Jesus dwelled with those less fortunate, those that were down on their luck, or were sick or displaced from their homes, he valued the relationships that he developed with people that were suffering, much like those who are called to be in the development work or profession must do. And he, he worked hard to inspire them, and he loved them. It's that love and inspiration that allowed people to see a new path, to embrace new opportunities to recognize their own worth and their dignity, their own power, really. So Jesus was such an empowering presence to all those who knew him. He lifted people up to see what really could be. And that's that's what development workers are trained and often naturally wired to do. So that's why I felt like there was such alignment between who Jesus was and the example that he said and, and who development workers are often called to be in their roles and positions.

**Karin Peter** 11:51

So when we talk about Jesus as a development worker, we're talking about more than showing empathy, or acceptance or compassion. We're talking about partnering that with action.

**Andrea Read Davis** 12:05

That's right. That's right. Yeah.

**Karin Peter** 12:08

And not action that takes away the agency of people but action that works with the needs and the concerns and the yearnings of people.

**Andrea Read Davis** 12:17

And is is ultimately driven by those yearnings and needs and desires of the people. Absolutely.

**Karin Peter** 12:25

So when, first off, when did you begin working with Outreach International?

**Andrea Read Davis** 12:30

So I began working with Outreach in 2010, just after the earthquake in Haiti, actually. So we're coming up on 10 years.

**Karin Peter** 12:40

So in that 10 years with your work with Outreach, I'm assuming this has been critical to your understanding of what it means to move toward Jesus as the peaceful One through this lens of addressing systemic poverty.

**Andrea Read Davis** 12:57

Yeah.

**Karin Peter** 12:58

 Global poverty.

**Andrea Read Davis** 12:59

 That's right.

**Karin Peter** 13:00

 So how has Outreach International helped shape that in you? And and can you tell us a little bit about that, and maybe what that looks like for you with Outreach International?

**Andrea Read Davis** 13:12

Yeah. So, um, just a little bit of background too. So Outreach, as you said, established in 1979. So Charles Neff, Ray Schaefer, and Bill Higdon originally put and established what would later become Outreach International, with the intention that people living in poverty, have the right to participate in their own development. And so the approach that was integral in the very earliest days of when Outreach began, still exists today. And as I have gotten to know, the people that we work with and the methodology that we use, it's been so rewarding and fulfilling for me to really know and understand that those core values and core principles still exist from the early days. So to speak just a little bit more about that methodology over the years. It's what we call participatory human development, sometimes called PHD. And old I mean, it was developed early on but practiced and practiced and practiced in practice and fine tuned and evolving and basically, what we now feel we can confidently say it's community led development. So human and community development that is led by the community itself. So it's through PHD, that community based organizations are developed and really those, we call them CBO's: Community Based Organizations, and they are developed over time through repeatedly and thoughtfully addressing their issues of poverty. they evaluate and reflect on their experiences, building the capacity of local leaders. They start to form relationships and network with resource agencies locally, so that they can call on those resources, institutions and things for support as they act on their issues. And our work in each of these communities lasts about five years, sometimes a bit longer. By the time we usually depart those CBO's, those Community Based Organizations that are created, they'll graduate. And at that point, it's there fully and completely led by local leaders that live in their communities. They have a network of supportive resource institutions. It might be other NGOs, local government agencies, resource providers, that they can call on to support their endeavors, and ultimately, their community's vision, the vision that they have for what they want their, their home and their neighborhood to be. So it's a bit of a long process, but with the time and attention that is given to really understanding the local context, and ensuring that the group is engaged and inspired and committed to acting on the issues that they personally feel affected by. This is what really sustains the impact of our collective work together. And it's, it's enormously fulfilling work. And so, so, so grateful to be a part of it, for sure.

**Karin Peter** 17:00

So in your article, you share a number of testimonies from several outreach international coordinators. Can you share one of those stories with us? Sure.

**Andrea Read Davis** 17:11

Sure. So I actually, so the three there's three colleagues and friends that I tapped to share for this article, Krizza from the Philippines and Kapesha from Zambia, and Rashmi from India. Rather than sharing or repeating kind of their stories, I thought I might share one of my own. And I, I really have had the privilege to travel to many villages where our facilitators work much like the three of them. And I'm always impacted to see and hear about the work, the hard work that the community has done to achieve tremendous successes and projects. And things I mean, things like water access to their homes, or revolving loan projects that allow families to feel financially secure through the lean months of the year, or trettel pumps that allow farmers to irrigate exponentially more of their crops, expanding the yield, and therefore the income. So those are like the tangible testimonies of my time spent in the communities where we work like there, there are tangible, incredible things happening that we can see and touch and feel. But personally, I as a shy kid, I was a painfully shy kid. And it really took the love of community to break me out of that shell. And so I'm always struck with sheer awe and gratitude when I meet other women that reflect on their time working as a group in their community, and how their experiences working together have broken down their own shells. I recalled, so there's a woman in a community named Bosco in the Philippines. And when she stood and shared about her experience, she was comparing herself to a plant that I don't know the name of. It's an indigenous plant to the Philippines, like a ground cover kind of plant that when you touch it, it retracts and the leaves fold in on themselves and it gets it's really bizarre. It's almost like a sea anemone when you touch those and they suck in. Um, but she was complete comparing herself to this plant in that when she was younger, and when before she got engaged in this group, she was very sensitive. And she didn't like to speak up because she was always afraid that she might be negatively affected and so she was always kind retracted in on herself and didn't open up. But the experiences that she had and sharing with other people in her community, other women with common issues and experiences and, and trying things together trying new things and sharing about how those actions that they've taken have affected them, and developing relationships, how she became much more open. And she was much more confident to be open, often even. And now she's a significant leader in this community. And in this, this the organization that they've created. And so I'm not sure how many I've talked to over the years, but it's so common to hear people say, often, again, many of them women, I've never heard the sound of my own voice, in the presence of someone with authority. And through their experiences in advocating for their own issues and mobilizing to local government, they are put in positions where they are challenged by that. And as they evaluate and reflect on those experiences, they realize, "I have the power, I am strong, and I can do this", and just begin to significantly open to all of the potential and extend experiences that can come from working together. And and those shells, man, they they they break down when you work together, so. Community based organizations. Uh huh.

**Karin Peter** 21:48

Not just strengthen communities, strengthen individuals and the stronger threads of individuals make a stronger rope of community.

**Andrea Read Davis** 21:55

That's right. Yes.

**Karin Peter** 21:58

So and thank you for sharing that, especially when we think in Community of Christ about what our mission is, in, part of it is strengthening communities and empowering people to understand their own worth. I think our listeners can identify with that. And some of them might be asking, so how does this affect me? What does this mean for me, as I listen to this and learn about Outreach International, what can I do as a disciple of Jesus?

**Andrea Read Davis** 22:34

Yeah. Well, I mean, I think there's there's various avenues, of course, there's the more personal and then there's the more kind of global on the personal side, I mean, I'd suggest whenever and wherever possible, listen to those subtle signs and nudges and callings that you might feel to reach out to others. I truly believe that's the love of God. That's the example of Jesus inviting us to be his hands and feet. And not just hands and feet, but yours and mouth to listen and encourage those that are needing a kind of ear, and someone to walk a challenging path with them. It's not always easy. But on the personal side, I think that's what I would encourage, I think, on. On the global side, if having, the more personal interaction can be often challenging, I really would urge you to give, give with whatever means you are able to do so. Give to organizations that prioritize an approach that ensures communities and people, the people that are being served are central to the actions being taken, that they're making the decisions about their own future. They're building valuable experience and confidence through your donated resources. Also, as I as I mentioned before, now that the pandemic is likely to be affecting us for months and years to come, potentially supporting ways in which to narrow the digital divide, I think is another way to kind of think about how we can be useful to those living in poverty. The United Nations actually just unveiled in June, what they're calling a roadmap for digital cooperation. So I encourage you to check it out. It calls on everyone governments, the private sector, civil society, the tech community, and the global public, which is us in our faith communities to take concrete action toward addressing the most pressing issues of the digital age. So I think we, we all should work hard to ensure that those feeling disconnected or without the resources to feel connected, whether it's digitally or not, are able to access that invaluable connection. So yeah, that's it.

**Karin Peter** 25:22

Andrea, how has your work with Outreach International and your encounters with Jesus, the development worker? How has that affected your own daily discipleship?

**Andrea Read Davis** 25:36

Yeah, so, vulnerability time. It's not always easy. So I do, I do try my best to listen, listen to people and strangers when they want to share about their experiences. prayerful listening is something I practice, often holding the concerns and challenges of those that I encounter in my heart and mind as often as I can. But like I say, it's it's difficult, engaging in your community and prioritizing the needs of others. It takes time and it takes energy. And I know I can speak for myself and maybe others too, that are listening. I don't always feel as though those things, like I'm responding in the way that I should. There are times when those nudges or those callings get tamped down by other priorities or the fact that I have a lot of other things going on. But ultimately, I think, and want to recognize fully that my journey of discipleship with God is not based on one invitation, it's not based on one encounter with the divine now it's it's many repeated invitations and encounters. It requires me to pay attention and know that I'll be given another chance. And I know that I will take that next opportunity. And honestly, that's I mean, that's what grace is all about, right? So I feel God's grace often.

**Karin Peter** 27:24

Again, Andrea, I want to thank you for sharing with us today. And a little bit about your article, I wanted to point people toward the Herald article series, "Are we moving towards Jesus, the peaceful One?" So as we bring our conversation to a close, I understand that there'll be follow up videos and discussions planned after each article is released. So how can our listeners find those?

**Andrea Read Davis** 27:54

Yeah, so I'm Matt Frizzell, is actually going to be sharing an Instagram reflection on Jesus, the development workers article topic. And we think it should be actually released on social media this week. So do be on the lookout for that.

**Karin Peter** 28:11

That would be on Community of Christ, Instagram and Community of Christ YouTube channel. Yes. Yeah. And on Facebook.

**Andrea Read Davis** 28:19

Okay. Uh huh. Yep. And there also will be a zoom discussion on Monday, October 5, which will begin at 730. central time. And we'll be having more open forum discussion on the topic at that time, the information about that zoom. link will be available on the on the church website, and also shared via social media, Facebook, and Instagram, as well.

**Karin Peter** 28:46

Okay, so we can look for that. And I'm assuming it will be on the rotating a piece that goes through there when we log on to that account. So thank you for sharing with us about Jesus, the development worker, do you have any last comments or closing thoughts before we sign off today, Andrea?

**Andrea Read Davis** 29:03

Well, just to keep listening, and both to Project Zion, but also to the urgings of Jesus and remembering the power that each of us have to make a difference in the lives of others. And I just want to share to my sincere thanks for the opportunity to, to be here with you, Karen. And for all of those listening to

**Karin Peter** 29:29

Well, we are grateful for your presence here on Project Zion Podcast and to our listening audience. You can learn more about Outreach International by going to outreach-international.org. And there you can learn about their work or how to financially contribute to outreach International. And as always, I'm Karin Peter, and thank you so much for listening.

**Josh Mangelson** 30:03

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